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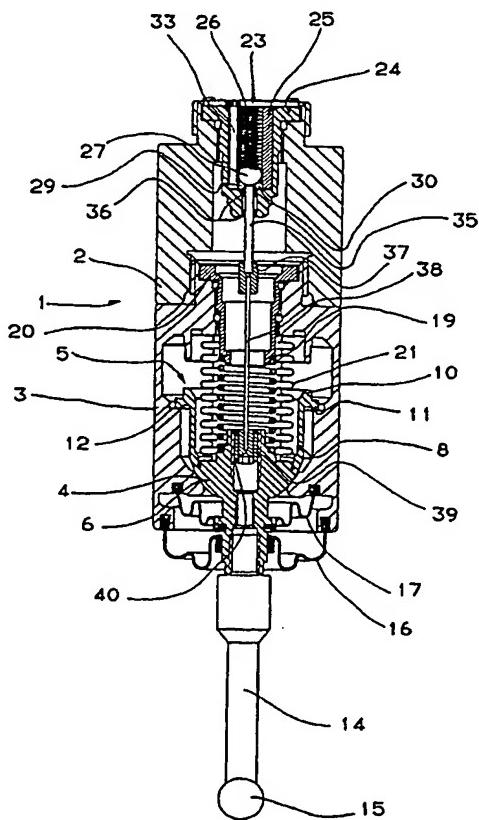
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(54) Title: HEAD FOR THE LINEAR DIMENSION CHECKING OF MECHANICAL PIECES

(57) Abstract

A head for the linear dimension checking of mechanical pieces, including a casing (1), that defines a longitudinal geometric axis, an arm-set (5), movable with respect to the casing, a feeler (15), coupled to the movable arm-set, for touching the piece to be checked, a bias device (19), arranged between the casing and the movable arm-set for urging the movable arm-set into contact with the casing, a detecting device (23), coupled to the casing, including a movable element (27), and a transmission device (35,38) between the movable arm-set and the movable element of the detecting device. In order to reduce the frictions and improve the repeatability of the head, the transmission device includes a wire (38), substantially rigid in a longitudinal direction but flexible in the directions perpendicular to the longitudinal direction. The wire has a first end coupled to the movable arm-set and a second end for cooperating with the movable element of the detecting device.



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DESCRIPTION

«HEAD FOR THE LINEAR DIMENSION CHECKING OF MECHANICAL
PIECES»

5

Technical Field

The present invention relates to a head for the linear dimension checking of mechanical pieces, including a
10 casing, that defines a longitudinal geometric axis, an arm-set, movable with respect to the casing, a feeler, coupled to the movable arm-set, for touching the piece to be checked, a bias device, arranged between the casing and the movable arm-set for urging the movable arm-set into contact
15 with the casing, a detecting device, coupled to the casing, including a movable element, and a transmission device between the movable arm-set and the movable element of the detecting device.

20

Background Art

Contact detecting and measuring heads of the type described are known from US-A-5299360.

The mechanic structure of these heads, based on a coupling
25 between the movable arm-set and the casing, achieved by means of a first constraining system substantially of the cone-ball type and a second constraining system for preventing rotations of the movable arm-set about the longitudinal geometric axis, and on the presence of two
30 annular facing surfaces adapted to enter into a substantially point-to-point contact, guarantees good repeatability.

However, in some applications, it is required that the repeatability errors be as small as possible, considerably
35 smaller than 1 μm .

The repeatability errors are mainly due to the effects of frictions among reciprocally moving parts, to shape errors

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of elements of the head, and to vibrations due to shock waves or other dynamic phenomena.

This is particularly true with regard to the detecting device and its arrangement in the head. More specifically,
5 a detecting device disclosed in US-A-5299360 includes a microswitch with a stem having an end adapted for contacting the movable arm-set. This contact may involve slidings and thus repeatability errors. Moreover, as the stem of the microswitch is not constrained with respect to
10 rotations about its axis, and it is possible that there may be errors in the shape of the stem, other repeatability errors may consequently possibly arise.

From the article "Multi-directional probe" published on pages 7 and 8 of the publication "Technical Digest No. 6,
15 April 1967" of the American company Western Electric, there is known a measuring probe with a housing, that defines a frusto-conical cavity, a position transducer measuring device fixed at the interior of the housing, and a movable arm-set with shaped portions for providing contact and a frusto-conical portion for cooperating with the frusto-conical cavity of the housing. The measuring device includes a movable element coupled to an end of a wire, axially rigid but flexible in transversal directions. The other end of the wire is connected to the movable arm-set.
20 Moreover, the measuring device includes means, not shown, that presumably consist of an internal spring, that, by means of the movable element and the wire, urge the frusto-conical portion of the movable arm-set towards the frusto-conical cavity of the housing.

30 Therefore, the wire is subject to a compressive stress of a considerable entity, owing to the fact that it has to apply force for causing contact between the movable portion of the arm-set and the cavity of the housing. Consequently, problems arise insofar as the dimensions of the section of
35 the wire are concerned, because of the contrasting requirements of providing resistance to a considerable compressive stress on the one hand and achieving good

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lateral flexibility on the other. Moreover, even the frictional forces acting on the wire necessarily have relatively high values.

5

Disclosure of Invention

Object of the present invention is to provide a checking head in which the component of the repeatability error due to the detecting device is particularly small.

10 This and other objects are achieved by a checking head of the herein described type in which the transmission device includes a wire, substantially rigid in said longitudinal direction but flexible in the directions perpendicular to the longitudinal direction, the wire having a first end coupled to the movable arm-set and a second end for cooperating with the movable element of the detecting device.

20 The invention enables to achieve negligible frictional forces in the transmission device and in the detecting device, avoid problems insofar as the design sizes of the transmission device are concerned and, in conclusion, considerably improve the head repeatability.

25

Brief Description of the Drawings

30

Other objects and advantages of the invention or of specific embodiments of the invention will appear from the following detailed description that refers to preferred embodiments illustrated in the enclosed sheets of drawings, given by way of non limiting example, wherein:

figure 1 is a longitudinal cross-sectional view of a contact detecting head according to a first embodiment of the invention;

35 figures 2a, 2b and 2c are enlarged scale, longitudinal cross-sectional views of a detail of the head of figure 1 according to three possible variants;

figure 3 schematically shows, in an enlarged scale

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with respect to that of figure 1, a longitudinal cross-sectional view of some components of the head of figure 1, according to a different embodiment of the invention;

5 figure 4 is a cross-sectional view taken along the line IV-IV of figure 3;

figure 5 shows a detail of the head of figure 3;

figure 6 is a variant of the components of the head shown in figure 3;

10 figure 7 is cross-sectional view taken along the line VII-VII of figure 6;

figure 8 shows a further variant of the components of the head shown in figures 3 and 6; and

15 figure 9 is a longitudinal cross-sectional view of a measuring head according to a third embodiment of the invention.

Best Mode for Carrying Out the Invention

20 The contact detecting head shown in figure 1 includes a casing 1, with a substantially cylindrical shape, consisting of two superimposed portions 2 and 3, coupled by means of a threaded coupling, that define a longitudinal geometric axis.

25 In the lower part of portion 3 there is a seat 4 with a substantially frusto-conical surface.

The movable arm-set 5 of the head includes a reference element 6 with a surface having substantially the shape of a spherical zone for engaging with seat 4, a hollow portion 8, with a substantially cylindrical shape, integral with 30 the reference element 6, and an upper flange 10, integral with the hollow portion 8, that has an annular portion 11 protruding downwards.

When movable arm-set 5 is in the position shown in figure 1, i.e. symmetric with respect to the longitudinal 35 geometric axis defined by casing 1, annular portion 11 is at a distance of a few micrometers from a corresponding stationary annular surface 12 formed in a plane recess of

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portion 3.

This clearance, that is not visible in the figure, is fundamental for the repeatability of the head.

Furthermore, movable arm-set 5 includes an arm 14 with a
5 feeler 15.

Between arm 14 and portion 3 there are two flexible, sealing and protection elements 16 and 17.

A helical spring 19 has its ends abutting against two plane surfaces formed in reference element 6 and in an abutment
10 element 20 integral with portion 3 of casing 1 and urges the spherical part of reference element 6 towards seat 4.

As disclosed in patent US-A-5299360, to which reference is made for any further explanation, the herein described coupling between movable arm-set 5 and casing 1 is adapted
15 to eliminate three degrees of freedom of movable arm-set 5. Another degree of freedom, that relates to rotations of movable arm-set 5 about the longitudinal geometric axis defined by casing 1, is eliminated by a metal bellows 21, that houses spring 19 at the interior and has its ends
20 secured to the plane surface of reference element 6 and to another transversal surface of portion 3.

The contact occurring between feeler 15 and a piece is detected, subsequently to a determinate pre-stroke in a longitudinal direction or, in the case of displacements of
25 feeler 15 in a transversal direction, at a determinate angle between the longitudinal geometric axis of casing 1 and the geometric axis of arm 14, by means of a detecting device that includes a microswitch 23.

The microswitch 23 includes a casing 24 with an insulating,
30 cylindrical element 25 that houses a spring 26 for urging a movable element, more specifically a small ball 27, made of electrically conducting material, into contact with two small bars 29 and 30, also made of electrically conducting material, secured to insulating element 25 at a lower base
35 of casing 24.

When small ball 27 contacts bars 29 and 30, microswitch 23 is closed, whereas when ball 27 disengages from at least

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one of bars 29 and 30, microswitch 23 opens. An external circuit, not shown in the drawings, is connected to bars 29 and 30 by means of conductors, not shown in the drawings, that traverse a longitudinal opening 33.

- 5 Furthermore, microswitch 23 includes a stem 35, axially guided by means of two sapphire bushings 36 fixed to casing 24 near contact bars 29 and 30. The lower end of stem 35 is secured at the top of a coupling element 37 that has its lower part secured to the upper end of a flexible wire 38.
- 10 The lower end of wire 38 is secured, by means of an insulating bushing 39, to a coupling and adjustment, threaded dowel 40, that is centrally coupled, by means of a frictional coupling, to the upper part of reference element 6.
- 15 The wire 38 is made of spring steel and can be, for example, 20 mm long and have a diameter of 0.4-0.5 mm. When feeler 15 is not subject to contact forces with a piece, the upper end of stem 35 is at a short distance from ball 27. Upon contact with the piece, wire 38 transmits an upward displacement to stem 35, and the latter contacts - after a determined amount of pre-stroke - small ball 27 and causes it to disengage from bars 29 and 30, overcoming the force applied by spring 26, that is relatively small with respect to that applied by spring 19.
- 20
- 25 Owing to the amount of the involved forces and the dimensions of wire 38, the latter is rigid with respect to axial forces, while can deflect in a transversal direction because of the transversal forces that are generated as a consequence of contact occurring between feeler 15 and the piece in a transversal direction.
- 30
- 35 From the foregoing description, it is obvious that, because the coupling device comprising wire 38 and stem 35 is coupled to movable arm-set 5, it is also subject to the constraint of bellows 21.
- Furthermore, the frictional forces acting in microswitch 23 and in the coupling device are low in number and value. Hence, the contribution to the repeatability error of the

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head provided by microswitch 23 and the coupling device is relatively small (in the range of 0.05-0.1 µm).

Figures 2a, 2b and 2c show how, in order to guide in a more accurate way axial displacements of stem 35 - by limiting 5 the length of its free portion - and to dampen possible vibrations of wire 38, different (or supplemental) guide devices are provided. In particular, in the embodiment of figure 2a, in addition to one of the two bushings 36 there can be foreseen a guide 42, made of antifriction material, 10 at the interior of which coupling element 37 slides. Guide 42 is coupled to casing 24.

Figures 2b shows a different coupling element 37' including a substantially spherical surface, that slides in a guide 42' coupled to portion 2 of the casing 1. Figure 2c shows a 15 substantially cylindrical coupling element 37" housed in a guide 42" coupled to portion 2. A ball bearing 43 is arranged between the coupling element 37" and the guide 42", and no bushings 36 are fixed to the casing 24.

The guide devices according to figures 2b and 2c guarantee 20 a guiding action involving particularly low friction and stresses.

It is pointed out that, in figures 2b and 2c, portion 2 of the casing 1 and casings 24' and 24" are vary schematically shown for the sake of simplicity. In particular, casings 25 24' and 24" are not substantially different with respect to casing 24 of figure 1.

It can be readily understood that the head shown in figure 1 can be modified in such a way as to eliminate stem 35, so that the upper end of wire 38 is free and can directly act 30 on small ball 27.

The figures from 3 to 5 show some details of a different microswitch 23' of a contact detecting head otherwise substantially identical to the one shown in figure 1.

In microswitch 23' there is not foreseen an axial thrust 35 spring.

Wire 38' has its upper end directly secured to small ball 27'.

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At the interior of the insulating element 25', located in casing 24' of microswitch 23', there are secured two stationary electrodes, or conducting bars, 45 and 46 electrically insulated that, together with small ball 27' and conductors not shown in the drawings, can close a detecting circuit. The bars 45 and 46 are arranged parallel with respect to the longitudinal geometric axis and side by side in a transversal direction.

A shaped element 49 made from insulating material (for example, ceramic) is also internally secured to insulating element 25' of microswitch 23', substantially at an intermediate position between conducting bars 45 and 46, and defines an abutment surface.

An elastic thin plate 48 has its upper end clamped to insulating element 25', and its free end specifically shaped for urging small ball 27' towards bars 45 and 46 in such a way as to close microswitch 23'. In order to facilitate the assembly, thin plate 48 has a window 50 and the end open.

It is obvious that microswitch 23' is set by operating threaded dowel 40, as in the embodiment shown in figure 1. Upon contact occurring between the feeler and the piece, and the subsequent displacing of wire 38' and thin plate 48, movable ball 27' is urged upwards, contacts shaped element 49 and disengages from at least one of stationary bars 45 and 46, thereby opening microswitch 23'. Then ball 27' slides on shaped element 49, urged towards the latter by thin plate 48, as shown with dashed lines in figure 3.

Thus, in the head of figure 3, wire 38' does not undergo any compressive stress and, indeed, can undergo a slight tractive force.

Obviously, as the contact force on the feeler ceases, ball 27' engages again both bars 45 and 46.

The absence of elastic compressive stress on wire 38' is the reason for which the only shock waves being generated as a consequence of feeler 15 contacting the piece are just those due to spring 19 (figure 1), whereas in the probe of

figure 1 even spring 26 of microswitch 23 generates shock waves.

However, these advantages with respect to the head of figure 1 imply a greater structural complexity, hence either of the two solutions can be chosen, depending on the circumstances (application conditions, costs involved, etc.).

Figures 6 and 7 show a microswitch 23'' with some variants with respect to the head of figures 3 to 5. More specifically, conducting bars 45' and 46' are arranged in a direction that is inclined with respect to the longitudinal geometric axis. Moreover, a flat element or small plate 44 made of rigid, hard material, like ceramic, is internally fixed to insulating element 25'' of casing 24'' and defines a plane abutment surface arranged in the direction of the longitudinal geometric axis.

The operation of a head including microswitch 23'' is substantially alike that described with reference to figures 3, 4 and 5. More specifically, upon contact occurring between the feeler and the piece, the subsequent displacement of wire 38' and the thrust of thin plate 48, movable ball 27' displaces in the inclined direction defined by stationary bars 45' and 46' until it touches the plane surface of plate 44 and disengages from at least one of the formerly mentioned bars 45' and 46', thereby opening microswitch 23''. Then ball 27' slides on the plane abutment surface of plate 44, urged towards it by thin plate 48, as shown with dashed lines in figure 6.

Figure 8 shows a microswitch 23''' with further variants with respect to the embodiments illustrated in figures from 3 to 7.

In microswitch 23''' shown in figure 8, small ball 27' is made of ferromagnetic material and, instead of being urged by an elastic thin plate towards the stationary contacts, consisting of two small balls (only one, 51, is shown in the figure), it is attracted towards them and towards the plane abutment surface of an insulating plate 44' by a

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magnetic disk, in particular a permanent magnet 53, set in plate 44'.

The structure of the measuring head shown in figure 9 is to a great extent similar to that of the head of figure 1,
5 except for the detecting device that includes a position transducer and the transmission wire that is connected in a different way.

The lower end of wire 38'' is coupled to adjustment dowel 40 as described with reference to wire 38 shown in figure
10 1. The upper end of wire 38'' is locked in a hole of a substantially cylindrical support 55 that carries in its central part a magnetic core 56, axially movable within electric windings 57 of an inductive position transducer. The windings 57 are formed in slots of a spool 58 that has
15 an axial hole with a surface that acts as a guide for support 55 and thus for wire 38''.

So, in the head shown in figure 9, wire 38'' does not undergo significant compressive stresses or tractive forces.

20 It has been proved that the invention enables to achieve probes suitable for operating in a workshop environment, e.g. for applications in lathes and machining centers, with repeatability errors smaller than 0.2-0.3 µm.

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CLAIMS

1. A head for the linear dimension checking of mechanical pieces, including a casing (1), that defines a longitudinal geometric axis, an arm-set (5), movable with respect to the casing, a feeler (15), coupled to the movable arm-set, for touching the piece to be checked, a bias device (19), arranged between the casing and the movable arm-set for urging the movable arm-set into contact with the casing, a detecting device (23;23';23'';23''' ;56,57), coupled to the casing, including a movable element (27;27' ;56), and a transmission device (35,38;38';38'') between the movable arm-set and the movable element of the detecting device, characterized in that said transmission device includes a wire (38;38';38''), substantially rigid in said longitudinal direction but flexible in the directions perpendicular to the longitudinal direction, the wire having a first end coupled to the movable arm-set and a second end for cooperating with the movable element of the detecting device.

2. The head according to claim 1, for detecting contact between said feeler and the piece, wherein said detecting device includes a microswitch (23;23';23'';23''') with two stationary elements (29,30;45,46;45',46' ;51) made of electrically conducting material, the movable element (27;27') of the detecting device also being made of electrically conducting material and being adapted for contacting said two stationary elements.

3. The head according to claim 2, wherein said microswitch (23) includes a thrust spring (26) acting on said movable element (27), the latter having a spherical shape, said second end of the wire (38) being adapted for contacting said movable element of the microswitch.

4. The head according to claim 2, wherein said

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microswitch (23) includes a thrust spring (26) acting on said movable element (27), the latter having a spherical shape, the microswitch including a movable stem (35) and a device (36;42;42';42'') for guiding the stem in the direction of said longitudinal geometric axis, said stem having an end for contacting said movable element of the microswitch and the other end secured to said second end of the wire.

10 5. The head according to claim 4, wherein said wire (38) is made of steel and the second end of the wire is secured to the stem (35) of the microswitch by means of a coupling element (37;37';37'').

15 6. The head according to claim 5, wherein said device for guiding the stem includes at least one bushing (36), arranged near said stationary elements (29,30) and adapted to cooperate with the stem (35).

20 7. The head according to claim 5 or claim 6, wherein said device for guiding the stem includes a guide (42;42';42'') adapted to cooperate with said coupling element (37;37';37'').

25 8. The head according to claim 7, wherein said coupling element (37') includes a substantially spherical surface adapted to cooperate with said guide (42').

30 9. The head according to claim 7, wherein said device for guiding the stem includes a ball bearing (43) arranged between the coupling element (37'') and the guide (42'').

35 10. The head according to one of claims from 1 to 9, wherein said first end of the wire (38;38';38'') is secured to the movable arm-set (5) by means of a coupling device (40) for enabling adjustments in the direction of said longitudinal geometric axis.

11. The head according to claim 2, wherein said microswitch (23';23'';23''') includes a device (48;53) for applying to the movable element (27') a force in a direction substantially transversal with respect to said longitudinal axis for bringing the movable element into contact with the two stationary elements (45,46;45',46';51), said second end of the wire (38') being secured to the movable element (27') of the microswitch (23';23'';23''').

12. The head according to claim 11, wherein said microswitch (23';23'';23''') includes at least a stationary abutment surface (49;44;44'), the movable element (27') being adapted for touching - upon contact of the feeler (15) with the piece - said abutment surface and disengaging from at least one of the two stationary elements (45,46;45',46';51).

13. The head according to claim 12, wherein said two stationary elements (45,46) have substantially rotational symmetry and are arranged adjacent in a transversal direction, and substantially parallel with respect to said longitudinal geometric axis.

14. The head according to claim 13, wherein the microswitch (23') includes a stationary, shaped element (49) made from insulating material that defines said abutment surface.

15. The head according to claim 12, wherein said two stationary elements (45',46') have substantially rotational symmetry and are arranged adjacent in a transversal direction, and substantially parallel with respect to each other in a direction that is inclined with respect to said longitudinal geometric axis.

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16. The head according to claim 12, wherein said two stationary elements (51) have a substantially spherical shape and are arranged adjacent in a transversal direction.

5 17. The head according to claim 15 or claim 16, wherein the microswitch (23'';23''') includes a flat element (44;44') that defines said abutment surface, the abutment surface being substantially plane and arranged in the direction of said longitudinal geometric axis.

10

18. The head according to one of claims from 11 to 17, wherein said device for applying a force to the movable element of the microswitch includes an elastic element (48).

15

19. The head according to one of claims from 11 to 17, wherein said device (53) for applying a force to the movable element of the microswitch applies a magnetic attractive force.

20

20. The head according to claim 1, wherein said detecting device includes a position transducer (56,57) and the second end of the wire (38'') is secured to the movable element (56) of the detecting device.

25

21. The head according to claim 20, wherein said position transducer includes stationary windings (57) and the movable element of the transducer includes a magnetic core (56).

30

22. The head according to claim 21, wherein said position transducer includes a support (55) and a spool (58) that defines an axial hole for housing and guiding the support (55), the magnetic core (56) and the stationary windings (57) being coupled to said support (55) and spool (58), respectively.

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23. The head according to any one of the previous claims,
wherein said movable arm-set and said casing include a
constraining system substantially of the cone-ball type
(4,6) and two facing annular surfaces (11,12) for providing
5 a substantially point-to-point contact.

24. The head according to claim 23, wherein there is
foreseen - between said movable arm-set and said casing - a
further constraining system (21) for preventing rotations
10 of the movable arm-set about said longitudinal geometric
axis.

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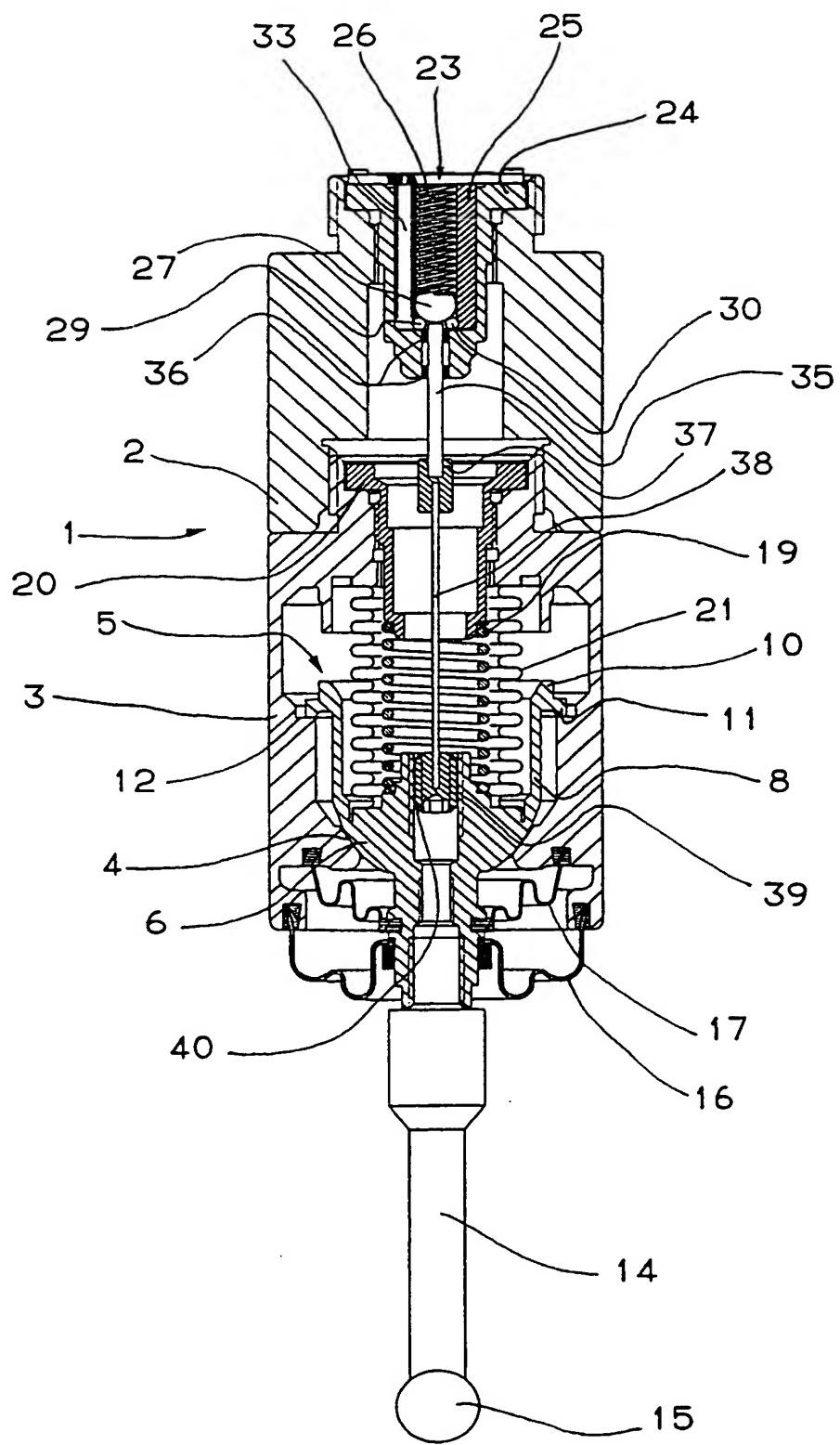


Fig. 1

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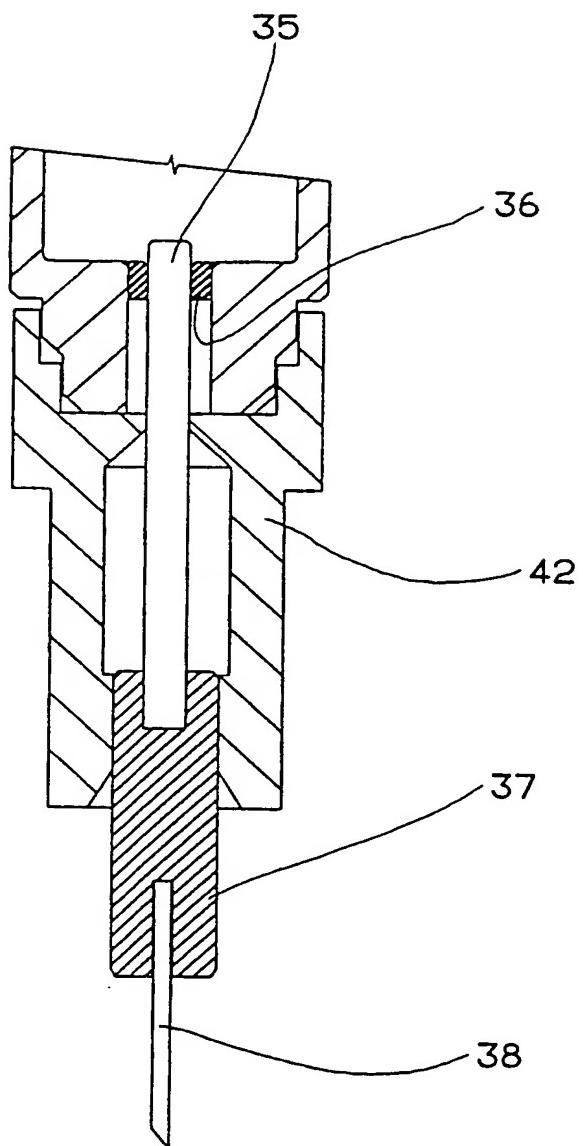


Fig. 2a

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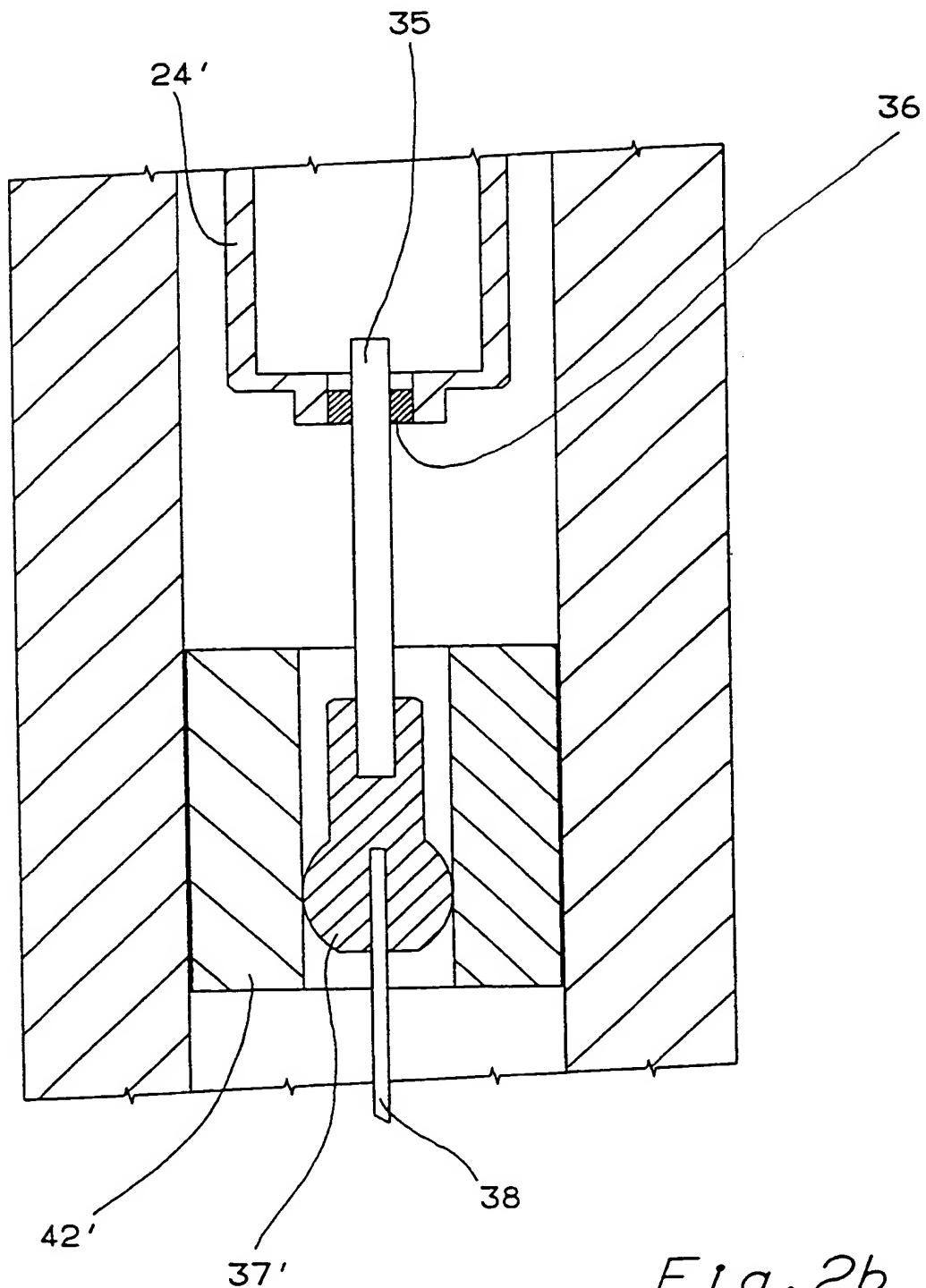


Fig. 2b

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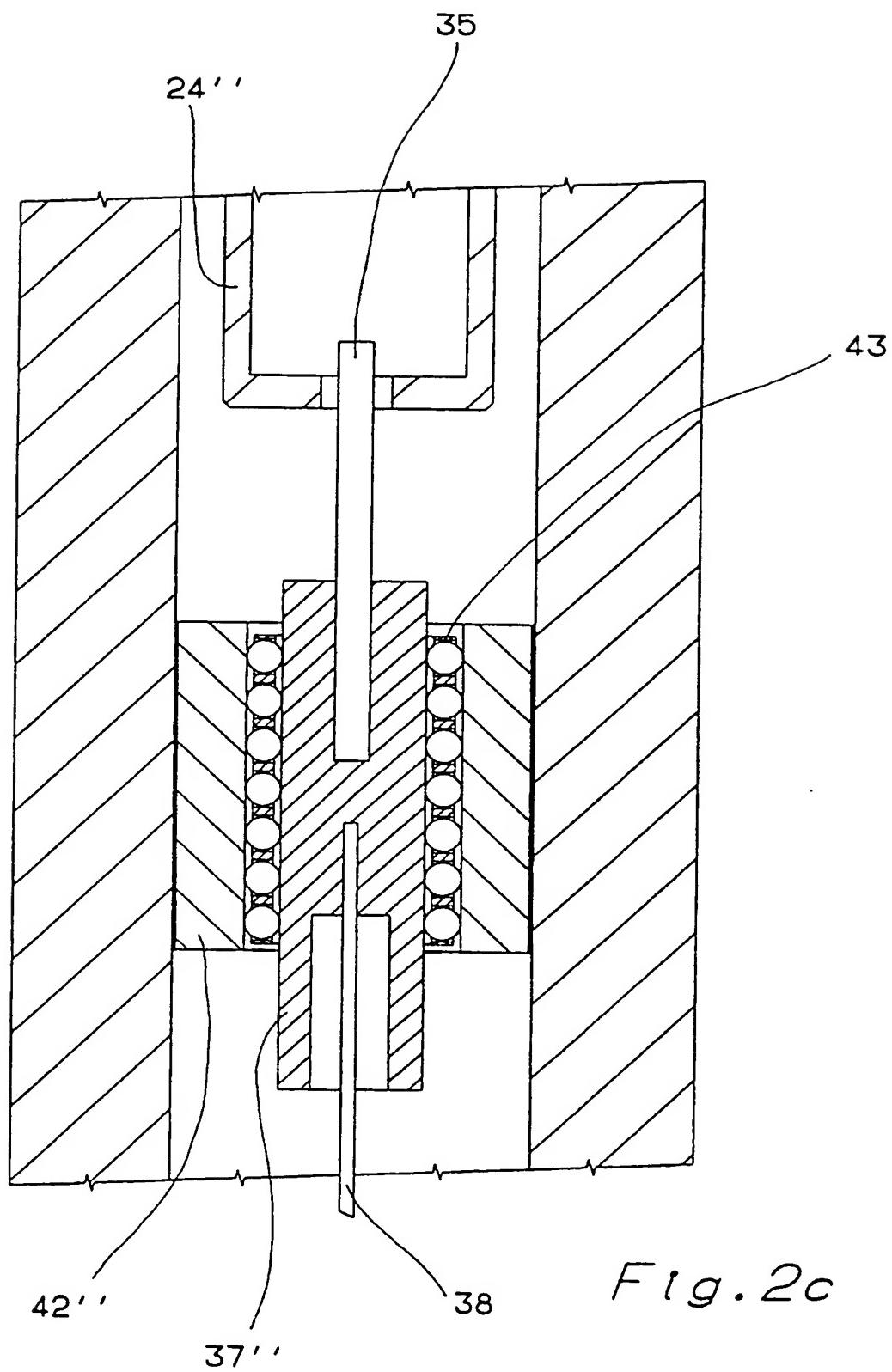


Fig. 2c

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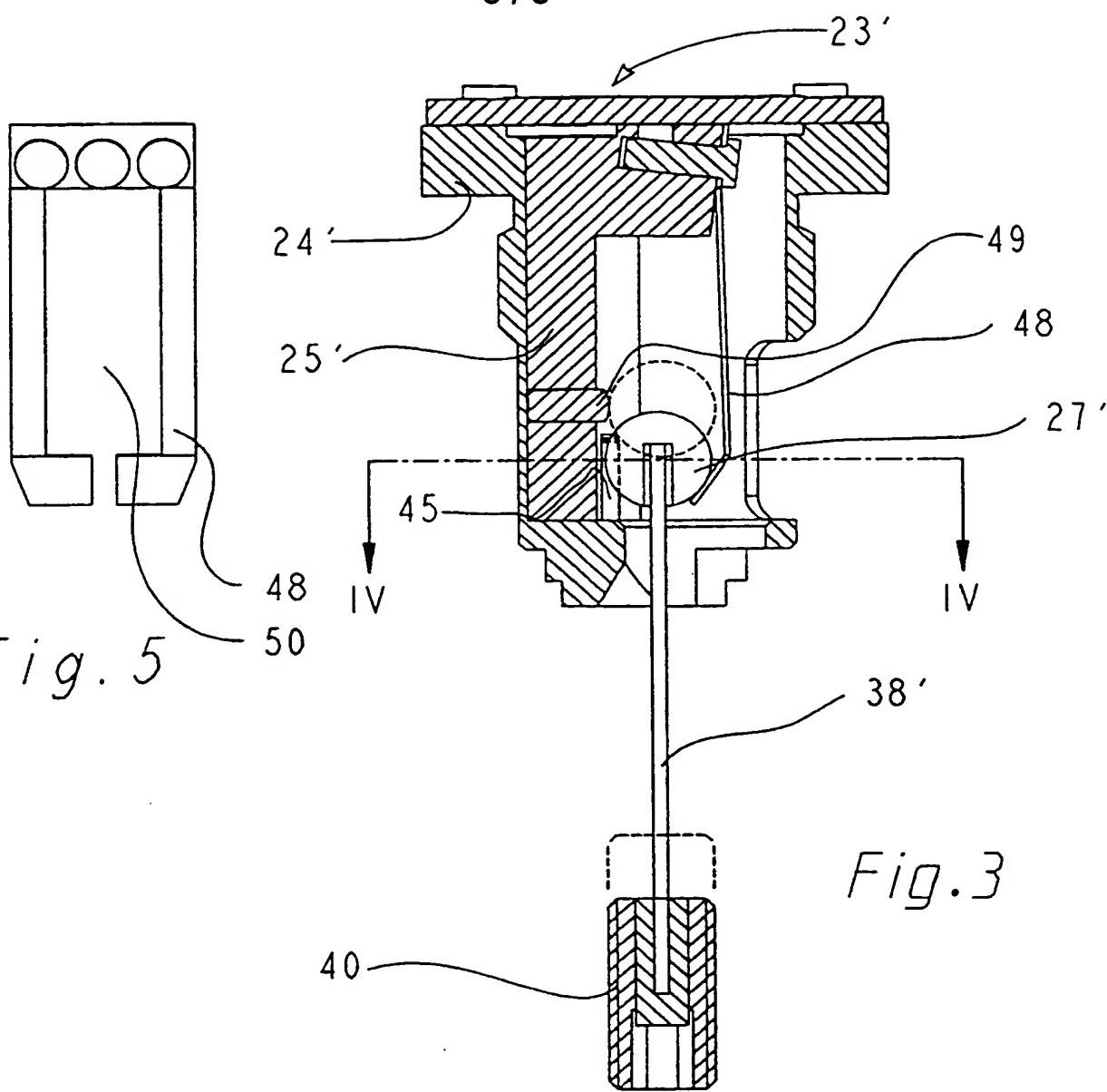


Fig. 5

Fig. 3

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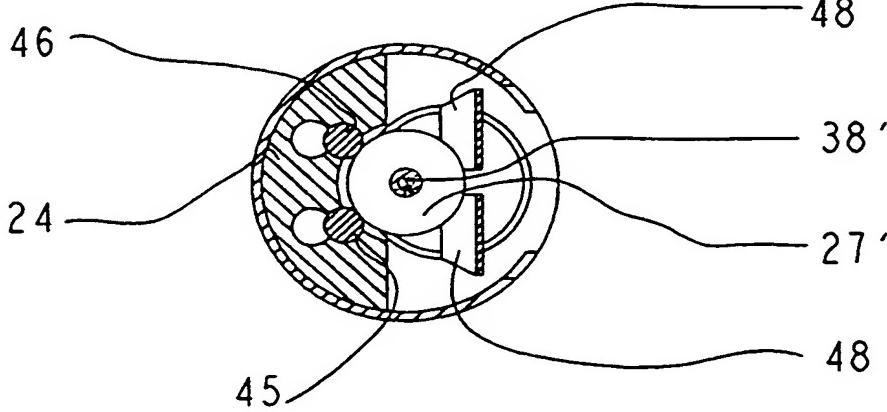


Fig. 4

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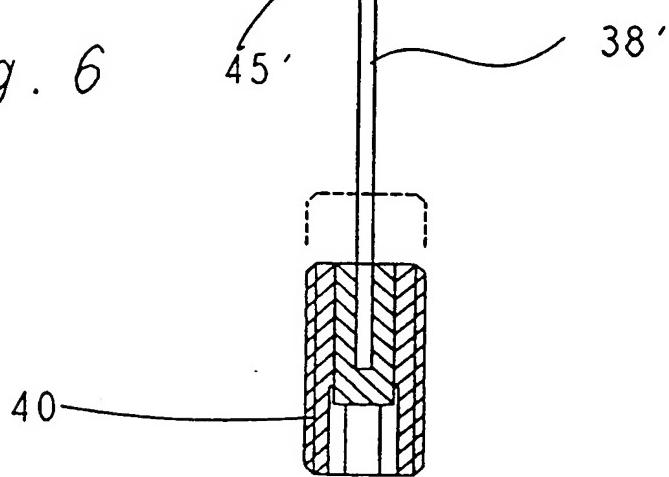
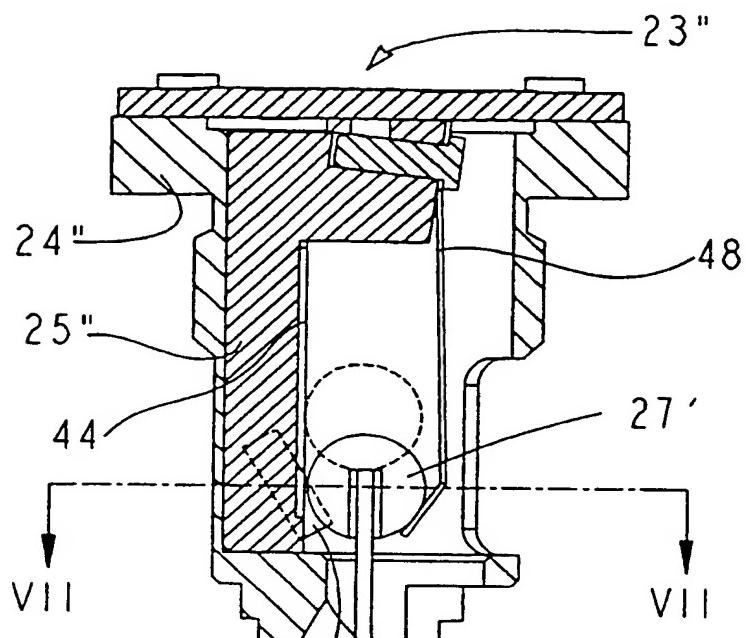
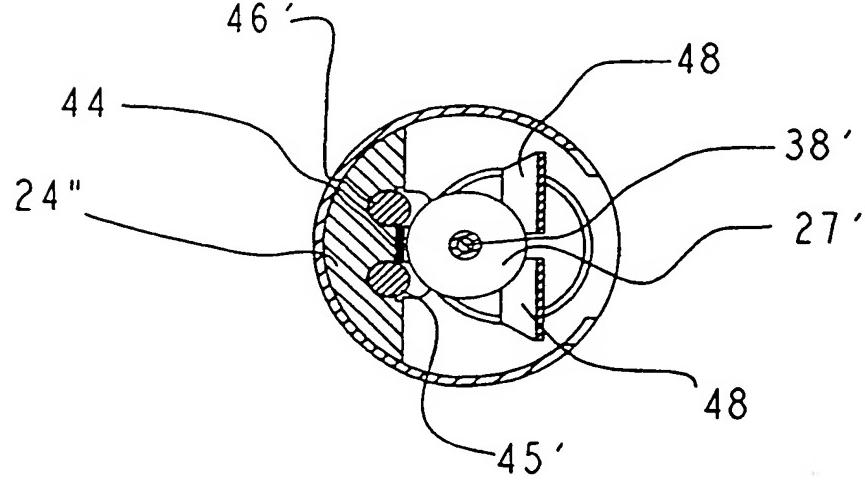


Fig. 7



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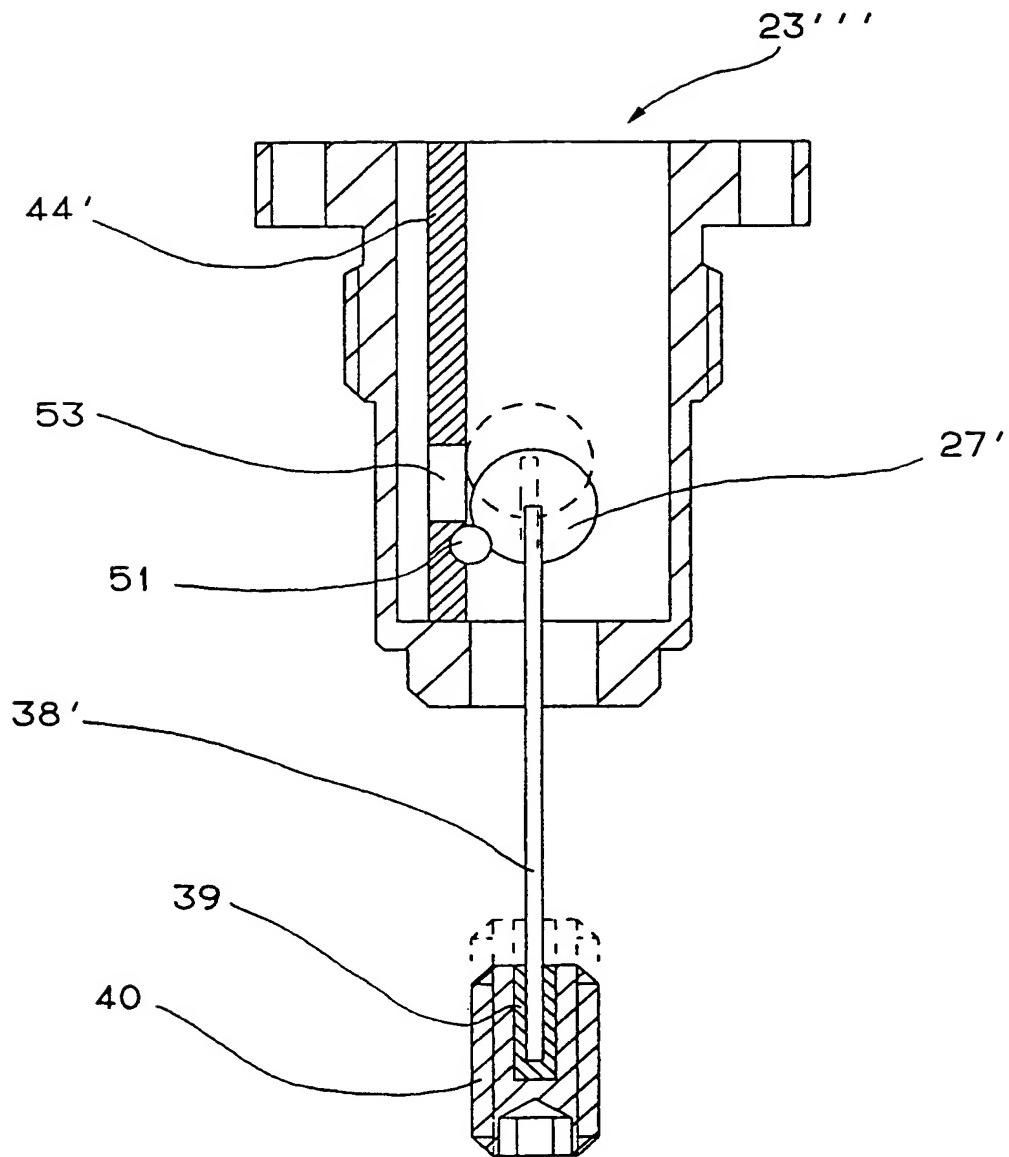


Fig. 8

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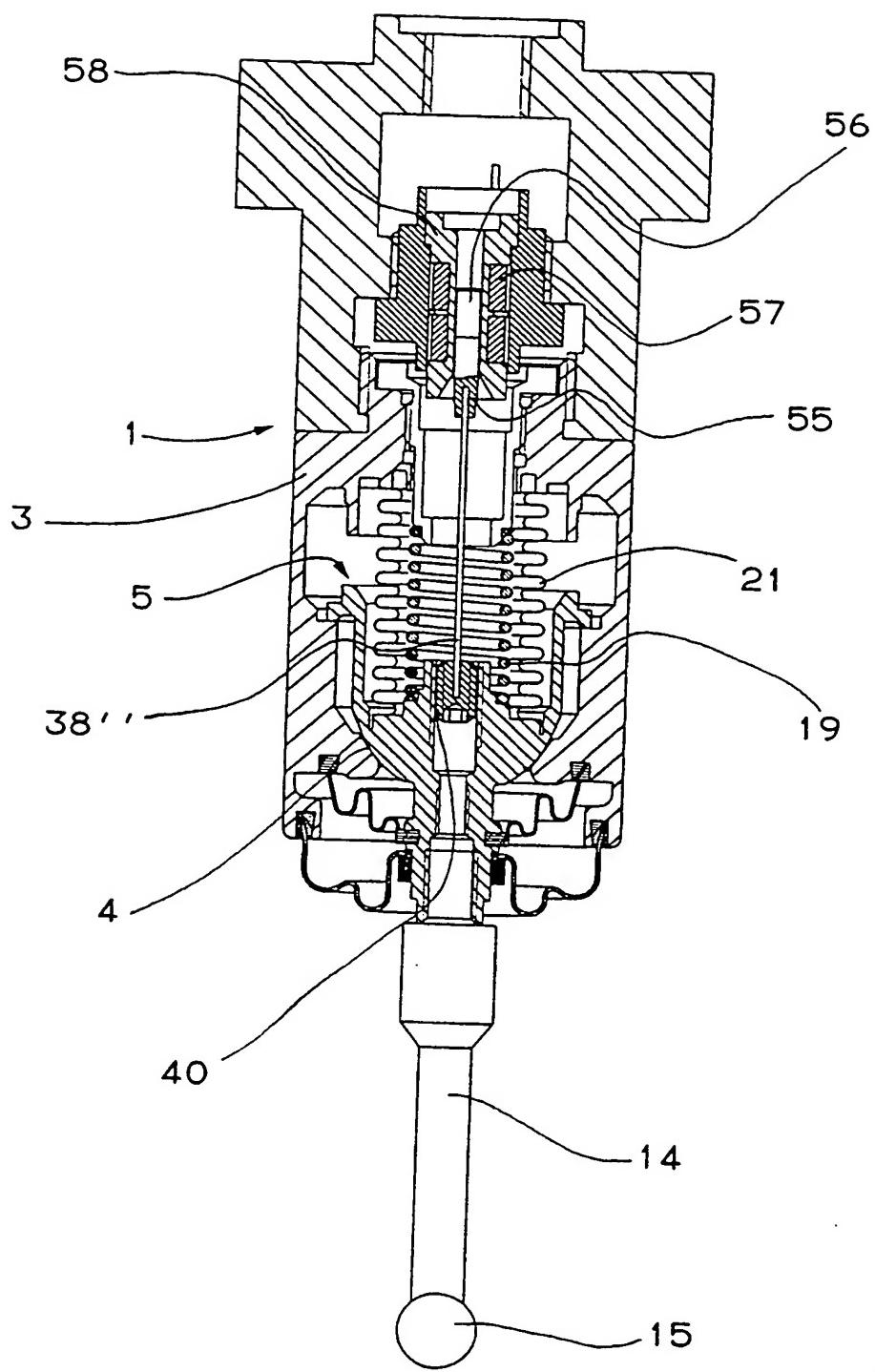


Fig. 9

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No
PCT/EP 99/06305

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 7 G01B5/012

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC 7 G01B

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 4 187 614 A (ABIRU HISANORI ET AL) 12 February 1980 (1980-02-12) column 3, line 4 -column 4, line 23; figures 7-9 ---	1,2
A	GB 2 208 934 A (MITUTOYO CORP) 19 April 1989 (1989-04-19) page 12, line 12 -page 15, line 6 page 21, line 10 - line 19; figures 1,2 ---	1
A	US 4 530 160 A (FEICHTINGER KURT) 23 July 1985 (1985-07-23) ---	20
A	US 5 299 360 A (POSSATI DECEASED MARIO ET AL) 5 April 1994 (1994-04-05) cited in the application -----	1-24

Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

Patent family members are listed in annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

20 December 1999

Date of mailing of the international search report

12/01/2000

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

...information on patent family members

International Application No

PCT/EP 99/06305

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